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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the use of emptiness in therapy and the importance of the counselor's comfort with the space and timing of interventions within that emptiness. It addresses spirituality from three different standpoints--creating a space that includes room for the suffering of the client, journaling, and use of the Rapha belief system. The purpose of Rapha is to provide professional counseling that focuses on the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of the person in need. The information included is drawn from the literature, as well as the authors' experience as counselors, in terms of the use of spirituality in addressing the emptiness in their clients and in themselves. Suggestions are presented for spiritual counseling techniques to address these existential issues in themselves both as individuals and as counselors, as well as in the counseling setting and the classroom. The use of beliefs is addressed in terms of applying these views to counseling settings. (Contains 13 references.) (MKA)

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Counseling and Spirituality: The Use of Emptiness and the Importance of Timing

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The great pianist Artur Rubinstein was once asked how he played the notes so differently from other pianists. He said, "the notes I play like every other pianist. But the pauses, ahhh the pauses." (Rechtschaffen, 1997, p.19). This quote captures the important role that space, emptiness has in the process of creation. Emptiness, as evidenced in counseling, is a multifaceted, shifting concept. The Existential/Humanistic perspective equates emptiness with the words "nothing" and "meaninglessness" while the spiritual perspective looks at emptiness from the idea of an illusion of fixed reality.

Clients often come to therapy with emptiness in their lives as expressed in uncomfortable emotions, negative thoughts, and shattered illusions of self, others, and the world. The presenting problem is a metaphor of issues related to emptiness and meaninglessness. Their perspective is that they have to change the external rather than the internal. This tendency is embodied in the following story. Two people walking barefoot along a very rough road, and one thought it would be very good to cover the whole road with leather so it would be very soft, but the other one, who was wiser, said, "No, I think if we covered our feet with leather that would be the same." (Trungpa, 1999, p.94)

Incorporating working with emptiness into counselor education programs can help reduce the ambiguity in working with this area. There are a number of ways this can be done. First, professors can encourage students to be more comfortable with silence, be more comfortable with non-action, and to experience the complexities of emptiness. Second, students can be encouraged by teachers to be exposed to various approaches: a) allow the client to educate the counselor on their particular view of emptiness (Bart, 1998). b) encourage the counselor to incorporate spiritual views into a specific theory (Curtis & Davis, 1999). Third, counselor educators can create a space for the experience of emptiness so that students can learn the benefits of its

therapeutic importance with clients. Ways to do this are through course discussion, course requirements, role plays, and case studies. The incorporation of these techniques into classrooms will help alleviate counselors' fear of working with the emptiness in the client's world.

In terms of therapy, creating a sacred space for the client allows the therapists and client to explore the metaphor of suffering. It allows for the client's story of suffering to be told in a place that is not interruptible. Focusing on the metaphor or story of the client's suffering honors the client and provides a sense of safety for him or her. Suffering in relation to emptiness is defined in many ways. A story by Gendler personifies suffering.

> Certain people adore her and talk about her as if knowing her gives them a special status. Other people despise her; when they see her across the aisle at the supermarket they look the other way. Even though Suffering is considered a formidable instructor, she is actually quite compassionate. She feels lonely around students who dislike her. It is even more painful to be around those who idealize her. She is proud only because she recognizes the value of her lessons (Gendler, 1988, p.31).

Therapists can learn to anchor the client while exploring the emptiness and suffering through the encouragement of self-care and the practice of spiritual beliefs. In providing self-care practices for the client, the therapist can ask, "How do you reassure yourself?" and provide ongoing reinforcement for the practice of self-care. Encouraging the practice of spiritual beliefs is a technique that may aid the client in filling his or her void. This practice is a creation of an inner refuge for the client in his or her own unique spiritual way. Lucia Rijker, a female boxer, states "I practice spirituality so I can be alone without being lonely." (Wright, 1999, p.103).

The development of trust and respect is necessary in a therapeutic relationship. With the development of this trust and respect, the therapist can watch for teachable moments in the relationship. "Teachable moments" are created from the client's suffering and the client's openness to experiencing and discussing the suffering. In this session the therapist can witness

anguish, mirror the suffering, and clarify options for the client. General therapy approaches include: a)asking the client gently, "What (including your self) is feeding the problem?", b) emphasizing the importance of the impact of the anguished state, c) avoiding client dichotomies, and d) encouraging mindfulness.

In creating a sacred place for the clients to experience emptiness and suffering, the therapeutic relationship becomes a safe place that invites the person's suffering. It also provides a community in which he or she is not alone, a genuine encouragement of self-care, and an emphasis on the importance of rituals.

As an expansion upon the idea of creating space that includes room for the suffering of the client, journaling creates a sacred space as a technique for welcoming emptiness in therapy. The journal is a tool for understanding the self in a spiritual, physical, and emotional context. This technique builds upon the ideas of creating a sacred space by having an uninterrupted space, focusing on the metaphors and stories, and providing a sense of safety.

Historically, the journal has been type of adolescent tool fro exploring the self as the young teenager chronicle's the day's events. Rainer (1978) provides an example of a different type of journal in The New Diary. She dismisses the idea of entering a chronological description of events and explains how the journal can be used to build more than just a memory. Focusing on Julia Cameron's model of morning pages, the journaling process provides that space need for clients who are suffering or feeling emptiness.

Suggestions for beginning the journaling process:

1.Buy a new (unlined) journal with no pictures or quotations. The simpler the journal, the less distracted the client will become during writing sessions.

2.Buy a good fountain pen. This may sound trite, but it is crucial to inhibit any distraction

from the clients' thoughts. An example would be a person writing as fast as they can while the pen will not work. If the person is supposed to write the first things that come to mind, then the pen will be the main topic of that session. Pens facilitate thoughts and therapeutic writing.

3.Make a limit for the client. This can be either a page limit (2-3 pages) or a time limit (10-15 minutes).

4. Stick to it. If the writer desires any type of change then the pages must be done daily for certain limit. This is not negotiable.

The way in which the client writes is also important. The new type of journaling encourages words that do not make sense. It encourages nonlogical random sentences. This allows the client to be completely free with what comes to their minds. It creates a freedom and sense of safety. It is safe because it is not perfect. It frees the writer from using punctuation incorrectly or forgetting to capitalize a letter. This does not matter in journaling. The main rule in creating a therapeutic writing process is to have no rules in the way the client writes. The client cannot write anything that is "wrong."

Uses in therapy will differ with each client's personal needs, but there are a few specific techniques that would be beneficial for clients who are feeling sense of being lost or lonely. If a client feels stuck with what to write on and is having difficulty with the process it is the therapists' duty to lead them in some journaling exercises. These can be used in session or between sessions. Perhaps a client walks in and says, " How am I supposed to have anything to write about? All I do is sit around on the couch all day by myself." A perfect technique would be to ask the client to write down everything that they did not do that day (Metzger, 1992, p.30).This can continue with who they did not see and where they did not go. Ask the client to do this three times a week between sessions and discuss the lists.

Journaling finds the meaning in meaninglessness and negates emptiness through creating writings from the heart. It is an outlet to tell the truth without being judged. The client will undoubtedly establish a trusting relationship with the book. It has been described as a means of finding inspiration, breathing in life, self, creativity , and God.

A more structured spiritual approach to encountering emptiness in counseling is the Rapha belief system. Rapha is one of the Hebrew names which means "Our God who healeth thee." The focus of Rapha is to provide Christ-centered psychiatric treatment and professional counseling that focuses on the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of a person in need.

There are four false beliefs in this system which are addressed through the use of scripture, prayer, and cognitive therapy. The first belief is that self-worth is equal to a person's performance: a person will rate themselves according to worthiness as to how their performance at work, school, and home were achieved. An example would be a client's statement like, " I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself." This is directly related to a fear of failure.

A second false beliefs is that self-worth and approval are directly related. It is the idea of gaining and earning approval by others that makes a person worthy. An example is, " I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself." (fear of rejection).

A third false belief is that moral perfection must be attained before a person deems themselves worthy and important enough to be loved by him/herself. Clients will enter into therapy with tales of their imperfections and mistakes and they will directly relate these incidents to their negative beliefs about themselves.

The fourth false belief is the client's sense of hopelessness. Many therapists encounter hopelessness in clients with depression and Rapha creates a space in which the client is given a

new hope and spirit. The client may believe in a thought pattern like, " I am what I am. I can not change. I am hopeless." The support of this system and the therapist aids the client in believing in God as well as herself or himself.

The declaration of Rapha:

Because of Christ's redemption, I am a new creation of infinite worth.
I am deeply loved,
I am completely forgiven,
I am fully pleasing,
I am totally accepted by God,
I am absolutely complete in Christ.

In summary, this presentation addressed spirituality from three different standpoints. The panel provided information drawn from the literature as well as their experience as counselors in terms of the use of spirituality in addressing the emptiness in their clients and themselves. The panel presented suggestions for spiritual counseling techniques to address these existential issues in both themselves and individual and counselors and in the counseling setting and classroom. The use of spiritual beliefs was address with the audience in terms of applying these views to their won work settings, A focus throughout the presentation was on the " use of emptiness" in therapy" the importance of counselor's comfort with this space and the timing of interventions within this emptiness.

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